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S. C. PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

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UTILITIES DEPARTMENT

RETURN DATE: OK DW
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1 Q Please state your name.
2 A Dora Aliene Wilson.
3 Q What is your address Mrs. Wilson?
4 A P.O. Box 403, Forrest Hills Drive, Williamston, SC 29697.
5 Q Is this in the Forrest Hills Subdivision of Williamston?
6 A Yes.
7 Q How long have you been a resident of this subdivision?
8 A Since 1975.
9 Q How many residents are currently in the Forrest Hills Subdivision?
10 A 33 at last count.
11 Q Since you have been a resident of Forrest Hills, how has your sewage been handled?
12 A As long as we have been residents, J.C. Cox Utilities has handled our sewage. The
13 sewage is pumped into a lagoon that was constructed in approximately 1972 to handle the
14 effluent discharge from the subdivision. Obviously, over the years, the lagoon has filled
15 with the effluent and as the subdivision has grown it has become more of a problem. In
16 the mid to late 1990's, J.C. Cox Utilities sold its interest in this particular system to
17 Robert J. Ellison and his uncle Tommy Ellison. It is my belief that they bought the
18 property because they were more concerned with development of adjoining properties
19 they had acquired or intended to acquire and felt that with the acquisition of the sewage
20 system, this would give them an unrestricted opportunity to further develop the
21 properties. It is my understanding that they are intending to develop the properties
22 adjoining Forrest Hills into a mobile home subdivision.
23 Q Mrs. Wilson, has J.C. Cox ever had problems with the system since you have been a
24 resident?
25

1 A Yes. Cox was forced to upgrade the system in the mid 1980s and then sought a rate hike
2 from the Public Service Commission for doing the same. That application was denied.
3 There have been ongoing problems since that time which became severe in 1999. At that
4 point, DHEC got involved and Cox was cited for a number of violations and has been
5 fined. Cox, through its owners the Ellisons, has attempted to abandon the system. This
6 would have had a devastating effect on the Forrest Hills residents. We are currently
7 paying about \$15.00 a month for our sewage service and would have faced increases of
8 10 or even 20 times this amount if the system was abandoned or sold. Our worst fears
9 have now been realized with Cox's latest application seeking to increase rates up to 15
10 times what we are currently paying. It is clear that the system is no longer acceptable to
11 DHEC and thus they are forcing Cox to either upgrade or connect with the Town of
12 Williamston. We are aware that proposals have been made to tie the Cox system into the
13 Town of Williamston system or to the County of Anderson system. The nearest tie in to
14 the Town of Williamston system is about 1,000 feet away. The tie in to the Anderson
15 system is a greater distance away and would thus be more costly to tie in. At a very
16 minimum, a lift station will be required to be installed which we now understand from the
17 application will cost \$110,000.00. We further understand from the application that the
18 cost to upgrade to a new wastewater treatment facility would be \$500,000.00. In either
19 case, our rates would be increased by a minimum of 6 times that which they currently are.
20 Regardless, it is my understanding that it is the owner's responsibility to keep the system
21 in compliance and to bear all costs of upgrading and remaining in compliance.

22 **Q Do you have any knowledge regarding the Ellison's development plans?**

23 A Yes. The Ellisons bought a lot of the land surrounding the Forrest Hills Subdivision
24 with, I believe, the intent to develop the adjoining land into some sort of mobile home
25 subdivision. It seems that they now see that they cannot do this due to the sewer system

1 problems and have attempted first to abandon the sewer system and now to place it in the
2 hands of someone else to correct the problems which would allow them to develop their
3 property while escaping any liability and/or responsibility for the sewer system and also
4 reaping additional benefits via increased utility rates from the residents of Forest Hills,
5 none of which are responsible in any way for these sewage problems. This to me is
6 extremely unfair. It is apparent that Cox knew or should have known through exercise of
7 reasonable diligence of the problems that existed with the system when they purchased it.
8 The Ellisons have a long history of land acquisition in Anderson County and certainly
9 should be held to a higher standard of responsibility for the system as a result. The
10 current solution sought by the application before the Commission is an unacceptable
11 solution due to the fact that the Ellisons, operating as Cox, and Cox Utilities have
12 constructed and maintained the system since its inception, and because they allowed it to
13 fall into disrepair and out of compliance, they should be held responsible for the same
14 and the residents, who are innocent, should not be subjected to additional rate increases.
15 Further, Mr. Ellison has testified that DHEC has ordered Cox to install a wastewater
16 treatment facility. Mr. Ellison claims that the expense will burden Cox, however he
17 neglects to mention that the installation of a wastewater treatment facility would also
18 make service available to the 55 additional lots Ellison owns in Forest Hills, thus making
19 available increased revenue for the Ellisons from both Cox Utilities and the sale and
20 development of the additional lots.

21 **Q Have you ever had any problems with J.C. Cox's billing practices?**

22 **A** I have not, however, some of the neighbors have, and, as I am speaking on their behalf, I
23 would like the Commission to be aware that there are some perceived irregularities. The
24 residents have requested information concerning the billing practices, however the same
25 has not been forthcoming. We have also requested a copy of the Contract for Sale

1 wherein the system was sold from J.C. Cox Utilities to the Ellisons. Again, we were
2 hoping to find out something about the arrangement that was made and this also has not
3 been provided to us. We are very concerned about this matter and the impact it will have
4 on our neighborhood, our homes, the value of our homes and our future in Williamston.
5 We implore the Commission not to grant Cox's application for a rate increase under
6 either scenario that has been proposed, but to instead order them to make arrangements to
7 tie in with either Williamston or Anderson and/or insure its compliance in one way or
8 another at their sole cost and at no cost to the residents. It is my opinion that Cox is
9 before this Commission with unclean hands and is seeking a solution to a problem that is
10 uniquely its own creation, and one it was aware of when the property was acquired. To
11 saddle the residents, many of whom are retired or young couples, with a tremendous rate
12 increase defies logic and is counter to the purpose of this Commission.

13 **Q Does that end your testimony Mrs. Wilson?**

14 **A Yes.**